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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today announced its 2010 recommendations to Congress, the White House, and the State Department that 13 nations—Burma, China, North Korea, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam—be named “countries of particular concern,” or CPCs.

“Over the past few months USCIRF has visited a number of human rights ‘hot spots’ where freedom of religion is obstructed and related human rights are trampled,” said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair. “This year’s report offers new and important policy solutions to improve conditions where foreign policy, national security, and international standards for the protection of freedom of religion can and should intersect. The report’s conclusion is clear—the Administration must do more!”

USCIRF’s 2010 Annual Report documents serious abuses of freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief around the world. The report provides policy prescriptions for each nation on the CPC list.

The 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) requires that the United States designate as CPCs those countries whose governments have engaged in or tolerated systematic and egregious violations of the universal right to freedom of religion or belief.

Further, USCIRF announced that the following countries are on the 2010 USCIRF Watch List: Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Laos, Russia, Somalia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Venezuela.

While not rising to the statutory level set forth in IRFA requiring designation as a “country of particular concern,” watch list countries require close monitoring due to the nature and extent of violations of religious freedom engaged in or tolerated by the governments.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF’s principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress.

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